



# Dementia Friendly Missoula

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## Dementia Friendly @ your library

By 2025, the number of people age 65 and older with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias is estimated to reach 7.1 million-- a 40 percent increase from the 5.2 million age 65 and older affected in 2015. These numbers represent family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, colleagues, clients, and customers. We will all be affected by these statistics because they represent our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, colleagues, clients, and customers. It makes good sense personally and professionally to increase awareness about dementia in every part of the community.

Dementia is not a specific disease. It's an overall term that describes a wide range of symptoms associated with a decline in memory or other thinking skills severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia and accounts for 60 to 80 percent of cases. Other types of dementia include Dementia with Lewy Bodies, Frontotemporal, and Vascular.

- There are 5 million people today living with this disease. By 2025 there will be 7 million people living with the disease.
- One in ten people age 65 and over have Alzheimer's disease
- One-third of people age 85 and older have Alzheimer's disease
- Nearly 60 percent of people with dementia live in their homes and communities and need support from families and community members.
- One in seven people with dementia live alone.
- There are 16.1 million caregivers of people with Alzheimer's or other dementia. These can be your coworkers, your neighbors, or people that you interact with in your community.

## Warning Signs of Dementia

1. The first sign is memory loss that disrupts daily life.

One common sign, especially in the early stage of Alzheimer's, is forgetting recently learned information. Other signs include forgetting important dates or events, asking for the same information over and over, and increasingly needing to rely on someone for things they used to handle on their own.

You may notice:

- A regular library patron that does not remember where their favorite author's books are or how to checkout a book.

2. The second sign is challenges in planning or solving problems.

Some people may experience changes in their ability to develop and follow a plan or work with numbers. They may have trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. They may have difficulty concentrating and take much longer to do things than they did before.

You may notice:

- An employee turns in a document with errors and does not seem to understand the errors.

3. The third sign is difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or leisure.

People with Alzheimer's often find it hard to complete daily, familiar tasks. They may have trouble driving to a familiar location, managing a budget at work or remembering the rules of a favorite game. You may notice:

- A patron can't figure out how to check out an item and is frustrated that "the way we do this changed."

4. The fourth sign is confusion with time or place.

A person with Alzheimer's can lose track of dates, seasons and the passage of time. They may have trouble understanding something when it is not happening right now. At times, they may forget where they are or how they got there.

You may notice:

- A patron comes into the library and is very confused about where she is, how she got there and what she is supposed to do while she is there.

5. The fifth sign is trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.

For some people, having vision problems is a sign of Alzheimer's. They may have difficulty reading, judging distance and determining color or contrast.

You may notice:

- A patron has difficulty negotiating steps, reading signs, or become anxious walking across floors with high contrast patterns.

6. The sixth sign is new problems with words in speaking or writing.

People with Alzheimer's may have trouble following or joining a conversation. They may stop in the middle of a conversation and not know how to continue or they may repeat themselves. They may struggle with vocabulary, have problems finding the right word or call things by the wrong name (e.g., calling a watch a "hand clock").

You may notice:

- A library patron points to books and asks for "that stuff over there". She can't find the right words to clarify what she wants and becomes frustrated.

7. The seventh sign is misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.

A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places. They may lose something and not be able to go back over their steps to find it. Sometimes, they may accuse others of stealing. This may occur more frequently over time.

You may notice:

- As a gentleman leaves the library, he leaves all his checked out materials behind.

8. The eighth sign is decreased or poor judgment.

People with Alzheimer's may experience changes in judgment or decision making. They may pay less attention to personal grooming.

You may notice:

- A friend tells you that her mother gives money away to every charity that calls her.

9. The ninth sign is withdrawal from work or social activities.

A person with Alzheimer's may start to withdraw from hobbies, social activities, work projects or sports. They may have trouble keeping up with a favorite sports team or remembering how to complete a favorite hobby. They may also avoid being social because of the changes they are experiencing.

You may notice:

- At your regular library programming one of the regulars isn't coming to their favorite programs anymore.

10. The tenth sign is changes in mood and personality.

The mood and personalities of people with Alzheimer's can change. They can become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful or anxious. They may easily become upset at home, work, with friends or in any place out of their comfort zone.

You may notice:

- Someone who has been easygoing seems angry every time he comes into the library.
- A woman who has been independent for many years seems very fearful.

**Communication is about what we say and how we say it.** The tone of voice we use and our body language become more important as a person with dementia loses the ability to understand spoken language.

Use a calm voice and try not to speak loudly. Make sure you are talking to the person in a quiet environment so that they can focus on you and hear you easily. Smiling and gentle humor may also help the person feel more comfortable.

Consider your body language—how you are standing and how you use your arms and hands. Does your posture convey that you want to help or that you are frustrated?

Approach the person from the front. The person with dementia may have a loss of peripheral vision. Often times they have tunnel or binocular vision. Approaching from the front may reduce fear or prevent them from being startled.

- Speak clearly and be patient. Speak clearly, calmly, and allow the person time to understand information. It may take a little longer for information to process for someone with dementia. They may hear the information but have trouble interpreting what they hear. Try using different words if the person is not responding. Use simple short sentences and avoid direct questions. Keep choices to a minimum and don't raise your voice. When possible, use a quiet, non-distracting space/place to talk.
- Listen closely. Listen carefully to what the person has to say. Give plenty of encouragement as you look for clues about what they may be trying to communicate. The person may seem confused and say something that doesn't make sense to you. If the person finds it difficult to come up with a word, suggest one. But, be careful not to interrupt or finish their sentence. Don't rush. Try to go at their pace and work through the situation as best you can.
- Smile warmly and make eye contact. Someone with dementia may find it difficult to understand what is being said, but may quickly interpret the look on your face, your tone of voice, and your body language. Use a friendly tone and give body cues that respect their personal space.
- Respond to a look of distress. At times, people with dementia may have forgotten where they live. If someone looks lost and distressed, offer to help by asking if their address is on something in their pocket or bag. When necessary, local police can be of help.
- Watch for signs of change and offer help accordingly. Every day can be different. For some people with dementia, each day can bring a change in what they can do. How you help someone may differ each time you interact with them.

There are little things you can do to the physical environment to make it safer and more welcoming to people living with dementia. You have the opportunity to make it easier for someone with dementia.

- Entrances should be clearly visible and understood as an entrance. Make sure that glass doors are clearly marked.
- Signage for finding your way around should be clear, should use bold type, and should have contrast between the words and the background. Signs should be mounted to the doors or spaces they refer to – not mounted on nearby surfaces. Signs should be at eye level and well-lit. Avoid using highly stylized or abstract images or icons on signage. Think about placing signs at key decision points for someone who is trying to navigate your premises for the first time. Signs for getting to and from public restrooms are particularly important.

- Lighting at entrances should be high powered and include natural light when possible. Avoid pools of bright light and deep shadows as they appear to be “holes” to people with vision issues.
- Flooring should be plain, not shiny, and not slippery. Bold patterns on carpets, curtains or wallpaper can cause perceptual problems; plain walls and flooring are recommended. Keep floor finishes flush; stepped surfaces can cause confusion. Pathways should be wide.
- A family/unisex restroom or changing facility will allow someone to be assisted without causing embarrassment to them or another user.
- Quiet areas for someone who may be feeling anxious or confused can help that person recover enough to independently complete what they were doing.
- Seating areas in large spaces, especially areas where people are waiting, can help someone relax.
- Layout of an area should be free of clutter and arranged to make it easy to move around.

Adapted from Trainers Guide <https://www.dfamerica.org/business-training>

## **Resources**

Dementia Friendly America- Sector Guide for Libraries: [DFA-SectorGuide-Library+8.9.17.pdf](#)

10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer’s Disease, Alzheimer’s Association [Memory Loss & 10 Early Signs of Alzheimer’s | alz.org](#) or the brochure [10-Warning-Signs-Alzheimer-Society.pdf](#)  
[https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-dementia-ten\\_warning-signs-ts.pdf](https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-dementia-ten_warning-signs-ts.pdf)

[Dementia Friendly Missoula](#) is affiliated with [Missoula Aging Services](#) (406-728-7682).